

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
ACDA-12 EB-08 TRSE-00 OMB-01 IGA-02 AID-05 SIL-01
HA-05 IO-13 /106 W
-----045010 170529Z /11

R 161457Z FEB 72
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 018

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1211

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR MASS TS
SUBJ: ANQUISH OVER NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL

1. MUSTAPHA MASMOUDI, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INFORMATION
ASKED ME TO COME IN LATE FEBRUARY 13. HE SHOWED ME AN
AFP TICKER ITEM IN FRENCH REPEATING MOST OF THE NEW YORK
TIMES EDITORIAL OF THAT DATE OPPOSING ARMS SALES TO "REPRESSIVE"
TUNISIA AND A REUTERS TICKER ITEM SUMMARIZING THE EDITORIAL.
HE SAID HE HAD BEEN ASKED BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO DISCUSS
THEM WITH ME.

2. I TOLD THE SECRETARY OF STATE THAT, ALTHOUGH I HAD
NOT SEEN THE EDITORIAL, I HAD BEEN ALERTED TO ITS CONTENTS
BY OUR DESK OFFICER IN STATE THROUGH A PHONE CALL. I ADDED
THAT IT WAS AN EVEN WORSE DAY FOR GOT IN THE NYT THAN HE
KNEW SINCE THE SAME ISSUE CARRIED AN OP-ED PIECE ATTACKING
GOT REPRESSION OF TRADE UNIONS. HE BLANCHED. HE SAID HE
KNEW, AS DID THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THE USG COULD TAKE NO
PUBLIC ACTION TO CORRECT SOME OF THE FACTUAL ERRORS ON
WHICH THE EDITORIAL WAS BASED, BUT THEY WONDERED WHAT
MY COMMENTS OR ADVICE WOULD BE.

3. I REPLIED THAT, UNDER SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES, I HAD
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KNOWN WASHINGTON EMBASSIES TO OBTAIN OP-ED SPACE FOR
THEIR OWN PARTISANS AND TO CORRECT UNFAIR INFORMATION ON
THEIR COUNTRIES BY WRITING OR INSPIRING AMERICAN FRIENDS
TO WRITE LETTERS TO THE EDITORS. AMBASSADOR HEDDA HIMSELF
WOULD PROBABLY KNOW HOW TO ORGANIZE SUCH A COUNTERVAILING
PRESS EFFORT. I SAID THAT THE ONLY WAY THE DEPARTMENT

COULD COMMENT WOULD BE THROUGH ANSWERS TO JOURNALISTS' QUESTIONS AT THE DAILY PRESS BRIEFINGS BY THE SPOKESMAN.

4. HE ASKED WHETHER I WOULD RECOMMEND INVITING THE NYT EUROPEAN BUREAU TO SEND A CORRESPONDENT TO TUNISIA TO LOOK OVER THE SITUATION IN DEPTH. I TOLD HIM THAT NYT REPORTER PAUL HOFFMAN HAD SPENT SEVERAL DAYS HERE IN THE WEEK AFTER THE JANUARY 26 INCIDENTS AND HAD FILED STORIES FROM HERE. ALTHOUGH I HAD NOT SEEN HOFFMAN'S PRODUCTION, I TOLD MASMOUDI, I HAD SPOKEN WITH HIM HERE AND FOUND HIS VIEWS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION QUITE FAIR AND BALANCED. PERHAPS, SAID THE SECRETARY, THE GOT COULD ASK HOFFMAN OR ANOTHER NYT CORRESPONDENT TO COME BACK FOR AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION. COULD I HELP HIM TO GET THE NAME OF THE CHIEF AND LOCATION OF THE NYT BUREAU IN EUROPE? I PROMISED TO TRY. HE SAID HE WOULD SEE IF AMBASSADOR HEDDA COULD GET BUSY AND SPREAD THE GOT'S STORY, BECAUSE, ALTHOUGH TUNISIA HAS OFTEN BEEN ATTACKED IN THE FOREIGN PRESS, AN ATTACK BY THE NYT, ESPECIALLY ONE BASED ON MISINFORMATION, WAS A VERY SERIOUS THING FOR TUNISIA.

5. COMMENT: WE HAVE LEARNED THAT THE INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE OF FEBRUARY 14 HAS REPUBLISHED THE NYT EDITORIAL. THIS IS SURE TO COMPOUND THE GOT'S CONSTERNATION SINCE IT IS QUITE WIDELY READ HERE. TYPICALLY, THE GOT WILL SEE THAT DISTRIBUTION OF THE IHT IS DELAYED A DAY OR TWO UNTIL IT DECIDES HOW TO COPE WITH THE EDITORIAL'S
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ALLEGATIONS. OUTRIGHT CONFISCATION OF AN OFFENDING ISSUE, ONCE REGULARLY RESORTED TO, HAS NOT BEEN PRACTICED HERE LATELY. MULCAHY

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NNN

*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

Message Attributes

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Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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